

Parent Forum Q&A

Welcome to our parent forum. Grab a cup of coffee and come sit and chat with other Montessori parents who share many of the same issues you face. Parenting is a tough job. Tougher because of the high stakes involved. Do you ever wish you could have majored in parenting in college? One might wonder why there is no education for the most difficult job there is. This Parent Forum is designed to be a support for you. See how others cope, solve and embrace the difficult challenges of raising children. Share your questions, provide alternative solutions, or just sit back and feel a sense of camaraderie with this group of other involved Montessori parents.

Question #1: Yikes! My child is starting to get homework. What do I do?

Don't panic. I think homework is less scary than parents perceive it to be. Remember, it is **not** YOUR homework!

Montessori teachers use homework to reinforce lessons taught in class as well as teach good study habits. The teacher assesses your child's understanding of material and readiness to move forward partly upon reviewing homework. Your child needs the opportunity to practice and make mistakes at home while trying independently to complete an assignment.

My advice to parents is to be proactive and prepared.

First, get knowledgeable of the **teacher's expectations** and the homework schedule. Montessori teachers are developmental specialists in the age they teach so the homework expectations should be age-appropriate.

Second, allow a **consistent time** in your routine for homework to be completed quietly and calmly. I find that it works best for children to start their homework as soon as they arrive home from school and after eating a light snack. Some children might need to take a short break and run around outside before settling in to do homework.

Third, establish a **work area** for your child. My children worked at the kitchen table until they were in their upper elementary years and now work at desks in their bedrooms. Stock the child's work area or drawer near the work area with a range of school supplies. Pencils, paper, pencil sharpener, stapler, dictionary, and thesaurus are just some of the necessary items. Your child's teacher may provide you with a list.

Fourth, **be available** to assist in explaining directions, if necessary, and answer questions. I recommend you stay close by and read the newspaper, cook dinner, fold laundry, read through mail or engage in some other quiet activity. Younger siblings should participate in this "quiet time" as well. Televisions and radios should be turned off!

Fifth, set your child up for organizational success. Utilize a **homework bin** in your home to store backpacks and books. Position the bin near the door. Schedule time for your child on a regular basis to reorganize the work area and backpack and throw out or file older assignments. A calendar or **weekly planner** should be used to plot out the week's activities and plan ahead for homework time.

Lastly, don't hesitate to **contact your teacher** if your child takes longer than the expected time to complete the homework assignment or continually struggles. Montessori teachers can often tailor the assignment or expectation to meet your child's individual needs. More than anything else, you want your child to stay positive and feel confident when establishing homework habits! (**Click here to share your ideas**)

Question #2: My 4-year old child has come home from school for the past 3 weeks and tells his Dad and me that he does "carrot peeling and chair washing work" every day! My husband says we are paying too much money for this! Is it worth it?

I know the feeling – when my son was a toddler he chose coloring work everyday. I became more and more frustrated and finally at my son's conference, gently asked his teacher if she could redirect him to other "works" in the classroom. I thought he needed to get exposure to many different types of activities instead of returning to the same work over and over again.

I still feel grateful to his toddler teacher for her reassuring answer to my anxious question. She explained to me that young children move through developmental stages and that at the early stages of development, children prefer to repeat "works." She explained to me that my son wasn't just learning to color. His actions taught him many important skills including sequencing, processing, concentration, and how to complete a task. The Montessori environment allows children to choose their own work, during the early years, and learn the very foundation of learning. I trusted my teacher and allowed my son the opportunity to be true to himself. I reflect now and appreciate how his early coloring work and his strong fine motor skills, as a result of holding crayons and paintbrushes, led him to take hold of a pencil early on. My son quickly learned to write the alphabet letters and became an early reader. He now considers himself an "artist" at the age of 9 and still loves to draw and read. This foundation of learning will pay off as he enters middle school, high school and beyond. It was definitely worth every penny! (**Click here to share your ideas**)

Question #3: My child comes down the stairs everyday in mismatched clothes, shoes on the wrong feet and a sloppy ponytail. Should I really do as the teachers advise and say nothing?

I know it's hard. My son often wore his shoes on the wrong feet until he was 7 years old! My daughter mixes her plaids and stripes, and regularly chooses a pink shirt to wear with her red pants! I bite my tongue everyday because I see that my children view themselves as capable people when they do for themselves. I don't want to take that away from them!

The Montessori environment nurtures children's need for independence. Independence breeds confidence. When parents interrupt that process and ask a child to go upstairs and change clothes, they are in effect, saying to their child, "*you are not capable of dressing.*" A child stops attempting to dress independently and insists a parent choose the clothes when he or she gets negative reinforcement. This scenario plays out with the same dynamic over and over again, when parents interfere with their child's need to be independent, regardless if it is about dressing, or some other activity.

Children learn style and how to care for themselves over time by practicing, gaining confidence and experimenting. Allow your child to leave the house looking a bit sloppy or maybe mismatched, but proud and capable! Know you are doing the right thing as a parent, even if the logic seems to go against societal norms. I still remember being with my daughter in Friendly's Restaurant and having lunch, when a neighborhood parent whose child does not attend a Montessori School, commented to me that my daughter's dress was on inside out. She clearly made her observation known to me with disdain. Yes, I blushed a bit and felt embarrassed but replied, "*Isn't it great that Lindsay can dress herself!*" Another time, my son walked into school wearing his raincoat on upside down and backwards. I thought of correcting him but skittishly decided not to. I still remember my sense of pride when my child's teacher greeted my son with a smile and gave me a private, thumbs up! **(Click here to share your ideas)**

Question #4: My sister's kids do not attend a Montessori school and she continually expresses her concern that my children are missing out on pop culture. Should I be concerned?

No, be thankful! Children that attend Montessori schools learn to think for themselves. They choose their works early on in their education and get opportunities to decide how they wish to spend their time. Montessori children take home this resourcefulness and like to use their imagination to play. I watched over the years my children and their

school friends make up plays, engage in art projects, research animals for fun and run around outside and just be kids!

Children, who watch television excessively, play video games and gameboy, and listen to pop music get exposed early on to inappropriate messages. You need to screen and limit the available choices of pop culture and importantly, not cave in to peer pressure! You do not want to expose your child to violence, sexual content, bad language and other inappropriate material so step up and take charge! Use boundaries and limit the time and opportunities for exposure. Remember, children need to be bored in order to learn how to create new ways to spend time. Do not step in and direct the activity. Allow your child to process the feeling of boredom and find their path to creativity and imagination. Keep in mind; some adults never learned this important life skill!

A few years ago my husband and I decided that we were not comfortable with the game, paintball or laser park birthday parties. We let our children know early on that they were not allowed to participate in those activities because of the assimilated violence of the games. My kids were not surprised because they know how we feel about guns. They even kind of chuckled and I believe, felt proud of this new rule. Several times since we instigated this rule, they were invited to birthday parties at laser parks, and, without hesitation rsvp'd to their friends that they could not attend. This is just another example of how children appreciate and respond to understood family values and defined boundaries.

Finally, let your kids be kids. They have plenty of time to get exposed to the hottest trends. For now, preserve their childhood and your consistency and command will lead to imaginative activities and a greater sense of comfort for both you and your child.
(Click here to share your ideas)

Question #5: My husband and I feel pressured to schedule our children in sports, music and other community activities. My one child wants to experience them all and the other child prefers to come home everyday and do nothing. I'm so confused. What is the proper balance? What should I do?

Start by recognizing that Montessori children get exposed to many different opportunities in music, art and other forms of culture, while in school. They don't just learn from textbooks; Montessori children learn through actively engaging in the experience. My son learned about Botany by leaving the classroom and creating gardens outside and planting flowers and vegetables, labeling the parts of the flower and harvesting vegetables for snack.

Children also need time for homework and to relax. I know that family dinners at home regularly mean a lot to me. After I consider these family priorities, and overlap them with time constraints and available resources, I can assess the appropriateness and extent of extracurricular activities for my children. My children participate in extracurricular activities but there are careful rules of thumb that we abide by:

First, I recommend that young children do not participate in more than one activity until they are in early elementary school years. Younger children get enough new exposures and social interactions without adding more to their schedules. Later, I recommend that older children engage in between one and three activities depending on family time constraints, financial resources, child's desire, and ability for the child to stay relaxed and have fun with the activities.

Second, I believe that children should seek a passion and stay with the same activity versus switching activities every year. Some children might need to experiment before they find their passion. Give the trial at least three-to six months before letting the child decide to move on.

Third, I think that a child needs to maximize the opportunity of a single activity before given the leeway to schedule a second activity. This translates to practice, preparedness and attitude toward the activity.

Fourth, a younger sibling should not be forced to ride in the car for long trips on a regular basis to allow for the older child to participate in an activity. The whole family needs to be taken into account when making choices.

Fifth, a child who wishes to come home and do nothing should be given the expectation to participate in one activity. I suggest you give your child two choices of appropriate activities and if the child refuses to choose, then you choose for him/her.

I realize that the majority of children participate in many extracurricular activities and it is widely perceived that children need them to get accepted into independent high schools and colleges down the road. The reality is that children need to be guided by your wisdom and not by your anxiety. Use good sense when planning your family's schedule and your children will be more grounded, engaged and balanced as a result. **(Click here to share your ideas)**